

A stylized graphic of a house with an orange roof and two orange pillars supporting a white rectangular base. The text is centered within this graphic.

THE ALEXANDRIA PARTNERSHIP TO PREVENT & END HOMELESSNESS FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS

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Executive Summary

"to the struggles and frustrations of less fortunate citizens are tied the hopes and dreams of all citizens; and that in the long run, the gains that can be realized of the concern and assistance for which we have here pleaded will make of Alexandria a truly All-America City"

- Concerns Citizens of Alexandria, Letter to City Council, May 14, 1968

25 Participants self-reported that they are currently experiencing homelessness, at risk of experiencing homelessness, or formerly experienced homelessness within the City of Alexandria. Participants are accessing, or have accessed a wide array of services like shelter, housing assistance, food stamps, medication, rapid rehousing, structured reentry programs, mental health services, and supplies for children's needs.

This analysis is organized by emerging narratives within the client interviews, including:

1) History of Racial Equity in Housing, - Similar themes were expressed to City Council by Alexandria Civil Rights Leaders in May 1968. 2) Circumstances Creating Risk or Homelessness, are not unexpected given economic conditions and the pandemic. 3) Impact of State Service Provider Delays - It is worth considering what influence PPEH might have to increase responsiveness of state service providers and benefits. 4) Economic Opportunities. - Clients expressed frustration in their capacity to truly benefit from economic development opportunities. 5) Housing Opportunities are limited by the affordable housing crisis. 6) Staff Support and Policies.- Feedback that staff, in particular caseworkers and the Rapid Rehousing program are supportive and helpful. Dissatisfaction exists with some staff and program support. 7) Deserving of Support / Racial Equity - Clients pointed to economic disparities more so than racial inequities. It is worth noting many comments were based on interpersonal relationships, and staff was observed during focus groups to be majority African American. 8) Extending Dignity, Humanity, and Community Support - The need to honor a client's full humanity; develop supportive community care, and avenues for peer support, in and external to the partnership services, seems paramount. 9) How to Make Housing More Stable - Clients listed more funding, longer programming and more agency within their own decisions as well as empowering caseworkers to provide support. 10) Preemptive Outreach and Access - There is a strong suggestion that Alexandrians are not aware of the services available to them or how to access them before support is required. A variety of outreach ideas are shared by clients.

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FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS

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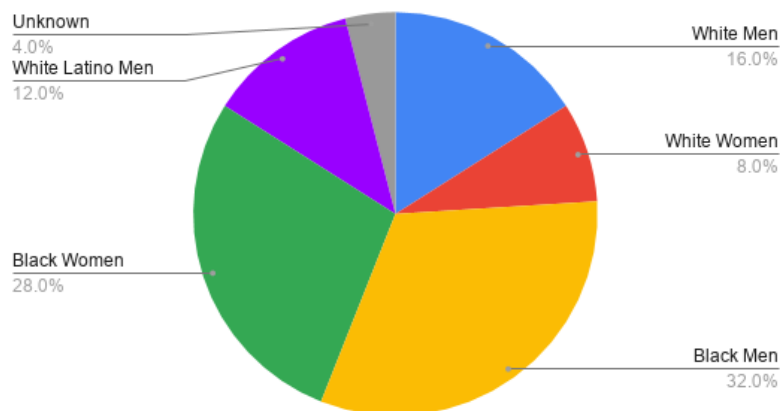
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- 2) Circumstances Creating Risk or Homelessness,
- 3) Impact of State Service Provider Delays,
- 4) Economic Opportunities,
- 5) Housing Opportunities,
- 6) Staff Support and Policies,
- 7) Deserving of Support / Racial Equity,
- 8) Extending Dignity, Humanity, and Community Support,
- 9) How to Make Housing More Stable.
- 10) Preemptive Outreach and Access

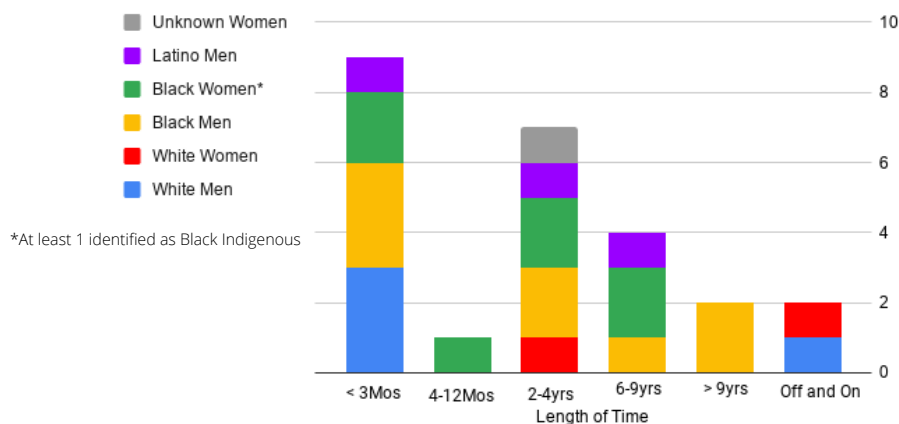
Focus Group Participant Profile

- 25 Participants self-reported that they are currently experiencing homelessness, at risk of experiencing homelessness, or formerly experienced homelessness within the City of Alexandria.
- Participants are accessing, or have accessed a wide array of services like shelter, housing assistance, food stamps, medication, rapid rehousing, structured reentry programs, mental health services, and supplies for children's needs.

Racial/Ethnic Demographics



Time Experiencing or at Risk by Race and Gender



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History of Racial Equity in Alexandria Housing

"As **concerned citizens of Alexandria**, Virginia, we submit this message to the City Council of the City of Alexandria on this **14th day of May, 1968**, to invite the attention of the City Government to some, but by no means all, of the **problems that complicated the daily lives of a significant segment of the citizenry** of Alexandria. We report on the basis of our contact with that segment of the population and with a sincere hope that the City will **heed our call to action while the time to do so remains.**"



"Although **the problems to be outlined below are common to individuals and families residing in various parts of Alexandria**, the primary area embraced by this message is known as the 16th Census Tract. While our attention is here focused on the areas of (1) pedestrian safety, (2) sanitation, health, and community upkeep, (3) law enforcement and police protection, (4) recreation, (5) city employment, (6) housing, and (7) communication, it is not intended that these items, or the photography contained in the accompanying appendix, be construed as the items need attention. Nor is it intended that any suggestions made or examples cited be taken to be all inclusive. In fact, it is felt that where community needs are obvious, **the responsibility for assuring many of the basic necessities incident to a civilized state of society is that of City Government.**"

It is sincerely hoped that City Council will find in this message the same feelings of hope and duty which inspired it; that it will work to make it understood by all citizens that **to the struggles and frustrations of less fortunate citizens are tied the hopes and dreams of all citizens**; and that in the long run, the gains that can be realized of the concern and assistance for which we have here pleaded will make of Alexandria a truly All-America City in which all Americans find opportunity and fair play and of which all Americans can be justly proud."

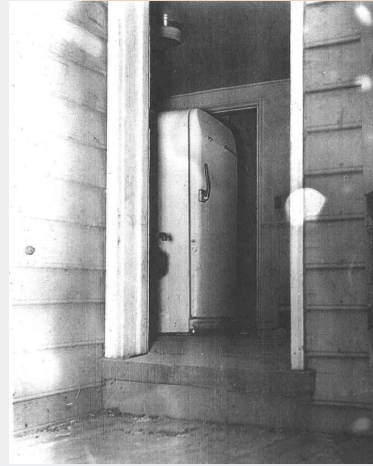
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HOUSES FOR SALE

These houses, thought vacant for months, have been permitted to remain open to serve as "hangouts" for all kinds of disreputable persons. Note the stove on the front porch. Note also, on the opposite page, the invitation, extended by the open door, to appliances which could serve as "death traps" for children.



Photos from 14 May 1968
Concerned Citizens of Alexandria
Message to City Council



AN UNPAVED PLAY AREA

Rocks and glass abound here. Residents of the area report many instances of injury to children.



A BREEDING PLACE FOR RATS AND DISEASE

Formerly a part of the City's drainage system, stagnant water is now left to present a health and safety hazard to the community. Note, on the opposite page, the boards which children cross to reach the school in the background.



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VI. HOUSING

A very serious problem facing Alexandria's Negro citizens, at every economic level, is the nonavailability of safe, decent, sanitary housing.

The unwillingness of City and State Government, financial institutions, private builders and other segments of the home building industry to provide housing that is available to Negroes is in large measure responsible for this condition.

In the 16th Census Tract, most housing is considered to be less than sound, while 23% is actually dilapidated and deteriorated. Twenty-six percent is overcrowded. There are reported to be approximately 600 Negroes on the waiting list for public housing. While the yearly public housing turnover rate for whites in Alexandria is approximately 50%, the rate for Negroes stands at 7.5%. Today, while most white families can find homes at almost any place in the City, it is virtually impossible for a Negro, regardless of his financial ability, to find a home or apartment for sale or rent anywhere in the City, other than in deteriorating areas, overcrowded slums, or potential slum neighborhoods. In addition, City Government has in recent years contributed heavily to a major decline in land available for Negro occupancy by converting land previously occupied by Negroes to its own use for schools, parks and highways without remedying the deficiencies thereby created. Consequently, Negroes seeking decent and sanitary living conditions in a residential neighborhood are often forced to move out of the City.

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A greatly neglected aspect of the Negro housing problem is the almost complete unavailability of suitable housing for middle and upper income Negro families who choose to reside in Alexandria. This shortage is primarily accounted for by the conditions which have arisen as a result of residential segregation. The closing of entire communities to Negro families who can afford to live there promotes the increased concentration of Negroes in the few areas open to them, deprives those of modest means of badly needed living space and forces many potentially valuable and talented persons to leave Alexandria in search of better housing. An example of the effect of the housing squeeze in Alexandria may be seen in the fact that among Negro professionals, two of three principals, 60% of the teachers, twelve of nineteen ministers, 6 of the 7 doctors and the eight practicing lawyers live outside the City. For far too many Negroes who grew up in this City, a decision to move "up" in Alexandria has, of necessity, become a decision to move "out" of Alexandria.

Recommendations:

In order to alleviate the critical housing situation facing Negro citizens of Alexandria, we urge that the following steps be taken:

1. That an aggressive program be instituted immediately aimed at encouraging local nonprofit groups and experienced developers to sponsor and develop sales and rental housing using Federal housing tools such as 221(d)(2), 221(d)(3), rent supplement, and any other programs which may be instituted as a result of the Housing Act of 1968.

2. Circumstances Creating At Risk or Homelessness

- Laid off during COVID and evicted
- Landed myself in prison
- Death of family members
- Medical conditions
- Inability to access state support
- House fire
- Government shutdown
- Mental health challenge
- Evicted for being two weeks late on a half month of rent

3. Impact of State Service Provider Delays

It is worth considering what influence PPEH might have to increase responsiveness of state service providers and benefits.

- *"Had I been able to access the unemployment benefits, I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't be homeless."*
- *"I also apply for some of the extended benefits programs, which the state of Virginia screwed up royally. There's one called the PUA. Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, which was supposed to work back in fall of last year. And apparently, it was just a complete mess. Apparently, restarted it in February and still can't figure out how to get my benefits, even though I got letters from them saying I was eligible for a higher amount. I got two letters saying that. There's another, another program called PEUC and which apparently I'm eligible for, but the websites are completely unworkable. I can't figure out how to do the weekly certification. I keep getting run around on the various menus, and then a disconnect. I've gotten normal unemployment over the years in Virginia from time to time. And it's a straightforward thing to go to a site, it's all there and make sense. This new thing that they did is apparently designed to eliminate people from getting benefits from what I can see."*
- *"Oh yeah, everything he just said was totally facts. Me and my [spouse] have been going through the same problem for months now."*
- *"I lost my job due to the pandemic, so they said I had PUA but I ain't never seen anything yet at all either."*
- *"I go online and see lots of complaints. The same complaints, like that, about the PUA and how it functions or doesn't function for people."*

4. Economic Opportunity

- *"You're having these community meetings about all this Virginia Tech and Amazon. How are residents going to get a job at any of these places? All of the things were agreed upon with Arlington so that has nothing to do with residents."*
- *"You lose your job, you can't go backwards in the rate once the rate goes up in your market rate, there's no going back. So now you're homeless. Everything to me just ends up back to being homeless, because there's no way to move forward and it's no way really to stay in between. Because, again, you're going into a rolling, looking at your income looking at your income. Oh, yeah, you got established. Market rate."*
- *"They're bringing in all this stuff, tearing up and taking it away and you put new Virginia Tech stuff and Amazon stuff and it doesn't benefit Alexandria, any? How much sense does that make? It didn't make any sense to me because you hike property taxes and property values for some people go up but you also make an original for the people who can't afford it already. So I mean they had, they basically said it was gonna housing out in any way nobody was going to get any jobs. So you bring in stuff and it is bringing jobs to the city but you never reach the people who need the jobs. You bring in jobs that they can't really quantify for."*
- *"Well, I stopped basically I've kind of looked at stuff and I listen and I read, and I'm like okay but I've actually stopped being active in anything. I've actually stopped being active in anything because it just seemed like an unwinning cycle. I wanted to stay here but I'm looking at being one of the next people to move out of the city."*

5. Housing Opportunities

- *"I wouldn't change anything. The services that I'm being provided to this program are perfectly fine. Now outside of this program, you know, like I said, I would want to see more housing opportunities."*
- *"Besides, the actual housing list is years long. I think issuing more housing opportunities for women with children I believe should be a priority."*

- *"the turnover was quicker, it would be better, you know, you call social services. Sometimes you don't hear back for a couple of weeks, and then a couple weeks, a lot of things can can drastically change. With your living situation being the way it is, you might not have access to the same phone that you had when you call, you know, so, then by the time they reach out if they do reach out, You're in a whole different place."*
- *"I mean they building housing units was no playground for the children to play with. How do you build a building with nothing for the children to interact and free up some space from the running in your house and doing things, when you have people who live downstairs? And then you get complaints and again, too many complaints there is your 2130, asking you to vacate your unit because your kids are doing whatever but you have no play outlet for these children."*
- *"I was working full time but I was getting paid minimum wage. So, affording a house, or apartment or room is a concern and my lack of knowledge of the services, which was available."*
- *"Before I went to prison, I was pretty much going to staying wherever I could. Sometimes it didn't matter, And actually didn't realize that that was considered being homeless without adequate shelter, food, water, not knowing where you're going to go from time to time. So I landed myself in jail, and then prison. So then after my prison sentence, I had nowhere to go because my family has only been through situations before I landed in prison. So I went from prison, you know coming out, not knowing where I was going to go, how I was going to get there. And then the trauma of thinking I would have to go back to where I started, homeless without stable living. So from prison I landed in Alexandria, I'm not from Alexandria I landed in Alexandria, because the prison system actually placed me in a halfway house."*
- *"I received the mental health and I received the shelter but they only gave it like four months to stay there and you have to find your own way to go. And Mental Health have kept me on a lot of lists, but I once was an addict, but I didn't have the criteria to where I'm using now so I'm being passed over. So and I've been moved from place to place and without the fundings running out and now that lands me, again being homeless"*
- *They are trying to help me get into an apartment, but a lot of [people] here have signed up for it and it hasn't come through.*

6. Staff Support and Policies

There is satisfaction and dissatisfaction with staff support. Participants expressed appreciation and gratitude for the services available to them as well as to caseworkers and staff who were going above and beyond to support them. Participants who have lived in other areas, generally feel Alexandria services are better than other areas they have experienced. There was also frustration expressed about limitations on what caseworkers were empowered to do for clients. The Carpenter's Shelter Rapid Rehousing Program and staff support came up regularly as a model. There is specific feedback about dissatisfaction with staff support in other shelters, as well as policies in various programs.

Satisfaction with Staff Response

- *"They fight [for you]."*
- *[So your case manager helped you dispute the decision, and was able to help you get services?] "Yes, that was a great help"*
- *"like a Rock. There's no other way to describe him. He's always there pretty much"*
- *"And so, I mean throughout this process, I haven't had a lot of clue as to what's going to happen or so this time is no different. But they just really came through. And so I that's all I could say about that"*
- *"If you're homeless, this is good place to be. I mean, you don't want to be homeless, it's a good place to be homeless. It's safe."*
- *"The case manager is now on. I feel safe with her. I feel that she's genuinely compassionate about her work. So yeah, this current situation I'm in. And the reason I say that is because I'm finding those people that give. So I have a very hard time dealing with people and trusted people but the person I'm dealing with now I trust."*
- *"She doesn't take BS for an answer, she always she's very out front She doesn't take BS. I don't know what it is, I guess it is our aura and just her demeanor and that makes me feel safe and not paranoid so I don't know exactly, I can't pinpoint it, but that was genuine that I had."*
- *"I'm very helped right now. I don't want to say the best setup but I take it away it is. I say to a handful of them, they've been very supportive"*

- *When I meet with my case manager, she allows me to tell her my needs, what I'm going through what I need and what's not being met. She's one person in the agency. It takes a long time say, well, we can't do this."*
- *"They've been very supportive and I do appreciate that."*
- *"My probation officer and one of her co workers. There was a quick changed in my situation and they were on top of it. They were really on top of it. And so, I mean throughout this process, I haven't had a lot of clue as to what's going to happen or so this time is no different. But they just really came through."*
- *"I was highly impressed with the people up at 2525 Mount Vernon. They were thorough and helpful as I didn't have anything to compare it to. They did a good job and when I came here it was reassuring knowing that there was actually a place that there might be someplace you could go besides like living, living on the street or like curling up in a doorway or something, living under a bridge."*
- *"I'm not in a position where I can really advocate for myself, but I will say that my case manager, and the program altogether does a good job at it."*
- *"They're going out of their way to make sure that you move on to solid feet"*
- *"At this point of time. I don't ask for help. I'm more of a person who just get up and go work and considerably enough, they've been very supportive. I've been able to consider not to take it, you know, like, I'm putting myself out there for nothing."*
- *"I'm just very grateful and I appreciate the fact that I'm able to actually see some growth and development, take its course. Because, I mean, growth and development is something to really cherish, and I haven't been able to cherish that and I've been able to gain that through this, you know crisis because it's not making it better. it's really upsetting to deal with this Covid mess. It's like so hard now."*
- *"A lot of people I know didn't make it on the streets. My friends are gone. I thank God I'm still here. I thank God for these services. If it weren't for these services, I don't know where I'd be at."*

- *"I like all the staff here. They're very friendly. They treat you like, they make you feel like your family, and to me I didn't feel that type of support at any other place I've been to. They're very welcoming and they don't raise their nose up like. Staff they just walk right past act like they didn't hear you. In here they acknowledge you even before you acknowledge them. So I really like that and they are very supportive."*
- *"There was a job coordinator, she would work on your resume and work with her contacts to help get you employed, even if we're just seasonal. But the most support that*
- *I actually have ever felt that I got it was Base Place which is not actually an overnight shelter but it's a place that you can stop by every morning and clean yourself up the laundry for me to use the phone and use it as almost like a PO box, but they will pass a lot of more information when it comes to city the services, then, then the actual shelter, unless you go to social services themselves. But if you stop on a daily basis to get to know you, You don't really get a case worker assigned to by the person who running it and once they get to know you, they will pretty much - you tell your story they pretty much work with you. Anything they hear about another way they'll pass it along to you and I think they've these places, that's more of a great job than the actual caseworkers and shelters."*

Rapid Rehousing Program

- *"Rapid Rehousing process works. Follow the rules and it works."*
- *"Carpenter's Shelter staff have and they're very supportive and they're very professional at what they do. I'm very pleased with them, I'd like to see the other three shelters in the city of Alexandria, I'm sorry about the two shelters, of Alexandria, do the same. At the community shelter, down by the [truly gate?], Route one. There's absolutely no support. I mean, I didn't see it. I didn't experience it. At ASC I'm sorry ACS that's ACS. They are supportive, but they don't have the staff, or the, I don't know. I don't know. They just don't provide the support. I mean, again, the Carpenter's Shelter is the model" [and what type of support, are you getting at the Carpenter's Shelter that you did not see or experience in the other shelters.] "Rapid Rehousing."*

Dissatisfaction with Staff Support/Policies

- *"gotta try to stay warm. Especially on a Sunday. Ain't nothing open like libraries and all that. [So you're basically outside from nine until four when they allow you to come back in?] And it's got to be under 32 degrees, for them the house of homeless people that put them up in somewhere. 32 degrees or lower. Okay, I don't know where they came up with that number. 50 degrees is cold."*

- *"not wanting to be set up to fail to be required to apply for apartments that, you know, there's no way I'll get you know there aren't many anybody that I know that's gonna rent an apartment to you without, you know, a work history, or things like that. And so that would be my biggest thing"*
- *"It's hard to say. Maybe more involvement from upper level management because whoever your caseworker is if you don't have a good relationship with them they can shut things down, pretty much at that level without it ever going any further"*
- *"needs to show compassion, and just seeing what person is coming from, and how hard it is for us to ask for that help to get back on our feet. Because it's almost embarrassing, you know, to be homeless in this day and time and not have the help. And, you know, some make you feel like, it's your fault. You're in this predicament. You know, they need some people skill"*
- *"I think, I think some of the determining factors are what qualifies you to get any sort of assistance. Like, that varies and I'm not sure if that should vary based on people's need I think sometimes the people that are assisting you are judging you. I don't know if I'm saying that the right way, but like the gentleman just pay. If you don't have a good relationship with the person that's your intake person possibility that you may not get the assistance that you need in the area. That's important to your family."*
- *"It's important how you treat people, Because you never know what you have standing in front of your face"*
- *"The Community Shelter, so they just really don't have time for you; they're wrapped up in their own little world. And, and that's what it is. That's why it's way out where it is, I guess I don't know. ACS wasn't wasn't too bad but again, they just don't compare to the services that are getting at Carpenter's Shelter."*
- *"ACS Shelter, and when I was there I was there like twice, and it's like they the staff kind of like looks down on you and like treat you real different they don't treat you like they don't welcome you there. They act like they're better than you, and like, The way they treat you is not good at all. Not at all. I done seen some things that they have done. That was not right at all. Far as like when people used to come in and donate things like that to the, to the homeless people in there they would take the things and give you things that didn't necessarily was worth keeping. They would do that. and I seen them them do that. And I've seen them do that a Christmas Time so I think that was very wrong."*

- *We have to do meetings one, three times a week. And it's kind of hard when I have a set schedule at work that I have in this type of work, which makes my income lower to come to me. And then every two weeks they're coming into my apartment to inspect my apartment. Make sure it's clean. Make sure it's business with that. And I'm trying to give my kids like a kind of a stable home, you know, and then I love to have people from the ninth grade. You give me a day. It's probably helping me get back on my feet and be like a home for us. But at the same time, we really don't have that much right."*
- *"The kids have to go to a program which they already in a program in school and stuff and I'm like, it's not working for me."*
- *"The meetings mess with my job. They're telling me that I need to find another job."*
- *"I definitely don't think that I'm being heard, because I think we're out there because some places, some people, some places do what they can do. So it's not their fault, maybe they get a certain fund, maybe they don't have the money to do things, but at least they're doing something that means something. But there is people organizations, there is things that do have the funds to do them. It's just some people are just greedy and don't want to do it. But there is people out there that really need help. It's getting really cold outside, I see people sleeping inside of buildings and like, I feel like. The people that are doing all they can do. Thank you. That is awesome. I appreciate it. I know they appreciate it. The people that ain't doing everything that they could do, and they know that they could do more. Like they should just step it up a little bit. Because if I had the funds in the time and effort and everything, I would be putting everything on the line."*
- *"And then everybody else has, like your case manager has to know everything that's going on who's coming to the house or stuff like that that small issue, but it's understandable"*
- *"I would say, someone helping to get on their feet. As far as giving them some type of something to go on something look forward to actually following through with, you know, people look forward to it, so they don't have to feel, You know, like, hopeless, unstable. I mean that's a bad feeling. Overall itself. And then when you do reach out for help, and no one's helping you, you're like, Whoa."*

7. Deserving of Support / Racial Equity

Although clients spoke about different access and outcomes, they did not attribute these differences to racial inequity. Many pointed to economic disparities or spoke of some people deserving support. It is important to note, while conducting these focus groups, I encountered a majority African American staff. It is possible existing racial inequities are complicated by program staff being African American.

- "Like they pick sides that pick sides between residents. Yeah, like, which ones they like the most or whatever, stuff like that"
- "They get along, they feel like they go along with you more than other ones, they definitely treat you better."
- "They should have a program for people who are actually progressing. If you're in the housing situation and you are progressing, leaning yourself towards self sufficiency, then they should have something, some type of avenue at the end for you. Maybe affordable units that you can look at to purchase within the city. So they're rebuilding all these places to make mixed communities but it's not for housing residents purchase is for how the residents to live discretely within it."
- "But some people, I don't know, some people you can help and some people you can't help some people don't want to be helped. I don't know how to explain. It just it breaks my heart. And I just wish that they would maybe they can make, I don't even know. I just feel like the housing thing is one of the top things for me "
- "I've learned if you see a person trying to help themselves, they're the ones that deserve the help, you know, I mean, some people, they just, they don't want to do anything. They don't want to work, they don't want to do anything. And a man that's trying to, you know, that's working, or you got some kind of an income. But they just for some reason, well, you got a job, you know, get your own place or whatever. And you don't make enough money to afford these expensive apartments. And I think they should be more selective of who they give no free apartments to. [And how would you like to see them be more selective] If a man's trying to help himself, help him."

- "It's really hard to be selective because you really don't know somewhat. See, like I see. I see both sides. I see. I see why they give some to some people and then I see why they don't. There's some people that want to live off the government and there are some people that need help from the government. I've seen people that get apartments just to sell drugs out of the apartment like okay, someone is sleeping on the street could be in that apartment. "
- "I just think that when I don't even know how to say it, because I get them sitting in your interview. And you know, someone might come in with a sad story, whatever, it might not be true, but they're still going to believe it. Or they're not going to believe it. I don't know. I just, I can't change the world by myself. But I wish that a lot of things were different."
- "When you get some type of structure instability, you know, at some point you start for me I'm speaking for myself. It was so uncomfortable, because I was waiting for some, you know, something to go wrong and then back of the street back to prison
- "After I paid [apartment complex] a \$200 application fee, they disqualified me because I was on active probation."

8. Extending Dignity, Humanity, and Community Care

The need to honor a client's full humanity; develop supportive community care, and avenues for peer support, in and external to the partnership services, seems paramount. Clients shared stories of current and former clients helping each other navigate the services, and staff members who treated them like family or friends. Even within the focus groups there was a sense of sharing information, guidance, and mutual support among participants, even those who did not know each other.

- "I spend 16 hours a day, you know, stressing over this stuff, trying to get out of here and get out of the situation. I'm amazed that more people you know, It doesn't surprise me that people frequently feel overwhelmed and don't know what to do, and go crazy, and do whatever. If you put the average person through this stuff, and I kind of think a whole lot of them would breakdown. It is really, really tough. I've been through some tough s**t over the years. Difficult situations and this is like one of the worst things I've come across."

- "I'm not allowed to take my pain medication because it doesn't allow you to take any type of narcotics in this program."
- "Okay to a certain extent, It's better than actually being outside on the street, but it also sometimes has you feeling like you locked up. I don't like that. At all. Having people just walk into your room whenever they feel like it. That's just breaking privacy. I'm trying to put my baby to sleep or I'm laying in bed with my [spouse] like I don't want it to be. I mean I don't mind if you knocking on the doors and waiting for us to say it's okay to come in. But if we're indecent or [baby is] asleep, it's like Bang! Bang! Bang! Uh, Oh we were just doing a room check."
- It's just really hard. It's really hard to do anything with your life if no one helps you. That is a really big that is like on me hard because I had never been in trouble. I had never done nothing. And then I got this felony on my record and it's like everything changed. I can't get food stamps. I can't I can't do this. I can't do that. I mean it is just a total wreck. I call There's one housing price and they told me that I would NEVER be eligible. Never. Like I would have to get it expunged off my record. And that's just that's awful to hear.
- "They see I was out there looking for a place, they'll stop you, and try to help you, and tell you which way to go. That happened to me in [inaudible] one time. Everyday I'm out looking for a place. And [she's] seeing me looking for a place. You don't know who is watching, or looking at you. She pulled me to the side and said "I can help" She had some pull with the government. Got me a place in [inaudible]. So, there is a lot of people who've been in our shoes and they will help. They will help."
- "I was in jail with no bond money, and I don't know if it was God or whatever . It took a mental health patient there to get me out, bond me out, take me where I had to go, bought me clothes and sent me to the hotel and was constantly coming there. And I could trust him, even though he was a male, and what had happened to me and he made sure that I was comfortable, that I will stay my distance I've could talk on the phone being that I just had our vacation with a man. And that's when he made me feel that it was okay. Cuz one man did it not all of them are the same."
- "I just noticed that I've seen because I was trying to look up places for men to go. I can't find anything around here for men. Not a lot at all."
- "I mean, I feel like men should have more selections. There's a lot of places for women around here because I was looking for someone that needed someplace and I couldn't find anything from him. I mean, it was it was insane."

- “The case worker at my kids school. When my kids were having problems in school, the education and the counselor and the case where I end up helping and got my daughter into a mental health program, and they end up helping us out with gift cards, food, and Christmas gifts because I couldn't do Christmas or anything. That was the only time I ever felt safe to tell anybody things was good, like, today I can still call my daughter's counselor, even though she's not at school and talk to her and she can direct me in the right ways I need to go to talk to who. and she'll find out information for me also and relate it back to me.”
- “I actually wanted to get into work to help the homeless around here in Alexandria, because I see so many and it kills me. I work at [restaurant]. So Sundays, I will take and get [food] and take it down the block and give it to one of them that I've seen, because like I just, it kills me because I've been there.”
- We all severely evoke the playing field and that we are empowered by our stories, and that we should share what we're going through with other people because we may be able to help others I mean like the model for PLTI was amazing. And it also gave us the tools to maneuver through the city of Alexandria. I had no idea what was available prior to being a part of that program so I think that if I think we, you know, more knowledge is power or you use your knowledge as power. I think that's very important, especially when you're in a city. I came from Fairfax County to the City of Alexandria and things are a lot different in Fairfax County versus the City of Alexandria, so I think knowing where you are and knowing your surroundings and how the system works, where you are is vital to I'm not saying that it can help you but it's vital in at least knowing what you can possibly get done with the knowledge, you learn.”
- “Everybody here is a family ”
- “Like I say, I was in the same situation. [staff] says Why don't y'all come on in man, get your life together. Come on in. I took a chance and look where I'm at.”
- “While it's necessary and people who can assist other people, you know definitely have a responsibility and we feel that way myself to do that.”

9. How to Make Housing More Stable

- "It's not always easy for somebody to stay in a shelter and they say that is the quickest way to get housing."
- shelters in the City of Alexandria, and even though when you exit, you have to wait at least 30 days to come back. In previous times that I've been back, the same case was not there anymore. So they, they change the caseworkers very often, but at the management level they're the same people who pretty much sign off on whether we can get the help on that. A little bit more of a follow up, I don't know. I guess I will say that With more interaction from the management level, not so much from the caseworkers, as a follow up, on what you will need to pass the, I will say the 60 day mark. When your assistance is just about to expire because they don't, once, once you get set on us on a legal situation they pretty much scratch off list and you are forgotten until you come back, I guess."
- "They don't really have a person like other, like other counties like Arlington goes into the outreach to the streets, or someone that just go into a shelter and spend a couple days without knowing that this case worker did, to see how life is actually in a shelter, or what resources they actually are supporting. But mostly the outreach."
- "I have children, and it makes things a little difficult to find housing to find shelters that accept a woman, with more than one child."
- "Wish Rapid Rehousing lasted more than a year"
- "More funding for housing support"
- "I would say, someone helping to get people on their feet. As far as giving them some type of something to go on something look forward to, and actually following through with, you know. People to look forward to it, so they don't have to feel, You know, like, hopeless, unstable. I mean that's a bad feeling. And then when you do reach out for help, and no one's helping you, you're like, Well, damn."
- "For me, it's just getting the stuff that I need for my children like diapers bath products, clothes, gift cards, just stuff we need to do this virtual school."

- "It is so expensive up here. Like I can't even believe how expensive it is. So I think that they need to make some kind of housing, I mean, that, that is really, really, really important thing."
- "Sobriety"
- "A job."
- "More stimulus checks"
- "like a major food drive something bigger than what they're doing Give out, give out something where they can go get their own food voucher or something. I've seen some homeless people go to the homeless shelter, and the food's been molded and nasty, and then they throw it away like that kills me."
- "Have women's job fairs could be people helping people build their credit backup"
- "Knowing that I have a place to lay my head every night. It's a game changer."

10. Preemptive Outreach and Access

The focus groups uncovered broad themes around Alexandria residents knowing what support and services are available, and how to access help, particularly before circumstances create instability. There is a learning curve of sorts that seems to depend on how tapped in you are to the community of residents who are accessing this support.

- "So, I'm so just now I'm understanding the services, which are available provided by the City of Alexandria. So attempting to figure everything out, was my concern. So right now, attempting to understand the programs to help find some type of permanent housing, and provide any supplemental assistance. I think that was pretty cool because I didn't know this before while I was going to school working part time. I'm now just understanding the services, which are available."
- "I'm used to working full time, having my own place and all that stuff. When I needed the help, I didn't even know what's here. I didn't know it was available, I didn't know whether I qualified. I didn't know who to go to."

- "I just never knew any of this stuff was available. Never use it. I never thought I would have to."
- "Knowing there's a place to go to, is probably a huge help. And knowing that there are people assigned to do this. I was squandering what little money I had on hotels. I had no idea where to go. I couldn't get unemployment benefits."
- "I don't see anything broadcast to people, yet the people. In fact, people are paying for work and paying taxes, don't even know that it's available to them if they need it, and not just the shelter but all kinds of other assistance that's available. It's available to any citizen around you. I don't recall seeing information about this on radio or TV."
- "I've never felt not safe, but just, you know, being able to be in the shelter and no one there's a place to sleep and shower and wash clothes and go to work and save money is, you know, is definitely helpful and I'm thankful for. I mean it just gave me the opportunity, as I said to work save the money to not be in that situation anymore."
- "One thing about the prison system is they do help you with, you know whatever type of program that you can get into you don't have to leave prison to get into housing, you know, and that took leaving my family my town, you know, the whole nine yards. It's not easy to just say hey I need somebody to help because it's a whole lengthy traumatizing process to even take the first step."
- "You know, outreach seems to be almost none. I mean, I found it. But it's not like a standard thing you know, hey, you're one of us. You're one of our neighbors. This is available I mean"
- "I had to go to jail in order to get myself out off the streets. Make services available to people who have not been in jail or prison, or even to prevent people from going to jail or prison."